

Testimony of Kathleen Hagearty, LCSW, Clinical Supervisor
City of New Haven, Health Department, Nurturing Families Network

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

February 17, 2009

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony regarding the proposal to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund Council. My name is Kathleen Hagearty. I am the Clinical Supervisor for the Nurturing Families Network program at the Health Department of the City of New Haven. I am here to express my support for maintaining the Children's Trust Fund Council as a distinct entity. I believe the decision to eliminate the CTF Council is not in the best interests of any taxpayers, program participants, or staff.

Under the umbrella of the Children's Trust Fund, the Nurturing Families Network program is able to provide a coordinated, tested prevention model to educate and serve Connecticut parents, particularly those at risk. The recent annual report clearly shows the impact and success of the program. I would like to comment on the role of CTF from my viewpoint as a long time social worker, now working in an urban public health department. The training and technical assistance given by the CTF Council enables us to meaningfully engage first time parents, teen parents, fathers, and other identified parents and then deliver a high quality of service. New Haven's NFN services were able to expand in late 2007 to a total of eight sites serving the greater New Haven area. As new programs were funded, CTF was instrumental in providing support to develop a collaborative network which is able to reach out and serve our diverse community. Their concentration ensures this unique collaboration continues and that our collective staff persons are among the most highly trained. Lastly, parents are willing to accept services from the NFN program because they trust the local provider and our relationship with the Children's Trust Fund.

Last week I stood in New Haven's City Hall listening to Mayor John Destefano present his plan to address the critical financial issues confronting the city in which I live and work. One of the most striking comments was his commitment to the Youth Initiative which directly addresses youth violence. In the midst telling us about potential cuts in the budget was recognition to fund important prevention work. As a public health agency we work to promote good health care every day and to learn from the community's problems in order to reduce future risks and costs. We now acknowledge confronting obesity and diabetes in our community will lower our residents' health risks and reduce the costs of related care.

The Children's Trust Fund Council provides a solid framework of prevention beginning prenatally, long before our citizens are at risk youth. Our staff use best practices and evidenced based research to provide information and education through intensive home visiting and groups. Home visiting is not just dropping in on a new parent, it is a thoughtful planned time where a family can learn new skills and risks are identified and addressed. CTF appreciates this model requires staff with specialized skills and an ability to work not only with a diverse community but also in intimate settings. They ensure not only initial training but also ongoing support with other colleagues doing the same work. The staff who facilitate our group work receive similar training and support.

For me, involving fathers and other male caregivers is just plain good social work practice. That being said I realize we in social services have often fallen short in this area. The Children's Trust Fund listened to staff concerns as well as findings about achievement and poverty and supported a focus on father involvement. The Fatherhood Initiative and the CTF committees directly address this failing with a dedicated effort to specifically reach out to fathers. This work and the related research is shared statewide with all Nurturing Families Network sites. Again, beginning prenatally, we see a proactive approach to ensuring greater success for our children.

Next week, I hope some of our parents are able to meet with some of you and your colleagues to talk about their experience with the Nurturing Families Network. I believe their positive experiences are in part due to the structure of the program within the Children's Trust Fund. I do not have any confidence that at-risk parents will be willing to participate in a program which is part of the Department of Children and Families.

Thank you very much for your attention and consideration. If you would like any additional first hand information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kathleen Hagearty, L.C.S.W.
Nurturing Families Network
Health Department, City of New Haven
54 Meadow Street
New Haven, CT
1-203-946-5754

11 Raynham Road
New Haven, CT 06512-5014
1-203-469-5640